

JACOBITE

THE APOCALYPTIC, ANCIENT AND MODERN

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The world has been closed down upon us. The wheels of Heaven that should have brought the

eschaton about have spun empty on their axis. That starry dynamo has creaked and creaked and at last, has stopped.

What’s happened? An exit was placed at the accomplishment of history, a final conflagration, followed by *annihilation*, *exolution*, and *transformation*, as Browne had it. Short: eschatology had dominated political thought since the 18th century, and its eschaton failed to materialize. The Celestial City didn’t descend from Heaven unto the Earth, nor the Earth ascend unto Heaven.

The apocalyptic, I contend, is not only radically opposed to the eschatological — it is also its only viable alternative.

Accelerationism, neoreaction, neo-Luddism, Bronze Age Pervert and post-Marxism — for those familiar with these thoughts, a sense of affinity, a secret correspondence, is felt to arise from their enumeration. The mostly online nature of this constellation is far from its unifying factor, and its opposition to hegemonic cultural discourse is secondary to the one element that binds it all — the apocalyptic.

Apocalyptic, from Ancient Greek ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalupsis*, itself a deverbal from ἀποκαλύπτω, *apokalupto*, ‘to reveal, to uncover, unveil’ — does not mean *eschatological*. However, apocalyptic literature has often concerned itself with eschatology, and thus has *apocalypse* been tainted with the sense of *eschaton*. Consider the verb καλύπτω, *kalupto*, ‘to cover’ and its cognate καλυφή, *kaluphe*, ‘submerged land’ — with the ‘apo-’ prefix, *apocalypse* reveals itself as originally pointing to the drawing of a veil. That is why the Bronze Age Pervert wrote the following:

I heard also of such things being under the sea, the disgusting and frightful things revealed when the sea recedes before a great storm. I will draw back the curtain on this Iron Prison and show you where it is you live...

The apocalyptic is first a call: “This is not it.” — But what do you mean by *it*...? — “Let me show you.”

It is a drawing back before a leap forward, and it recognizes that any quarrel one might undertake against this century will be on this century’s terms, and that this isn’t something to be pursued. While contending that the possibilities are infinite and infinitely actual, the apocalyptic is first a global refusal.

Mark Fisher concludes *Capitalist Realism* on that one sentence: “from a situation in which

nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again” — and here we find the apocalyptic in one of its purest forms. Instead of wasting away in a fruitless, exhausting struggle against the current year, the apocalyptic pulls the rug from under it and categorically refuses to consider it. There is no reformism to be found here. The apocalyptic does not wish to debate. This is what Nietzsche meant when he said he was “dynamite.”

The apocalyptic doesn’t question the ‘natural order’ affirmed by the powers in place — it preemptively poses it as unnatural in the extreme. It calls out to the Real, which, as Fisher has it, is *underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us*. Neo-luddite or radical ecological movements affirm the same: underneath the lurching falsehood of techno-capital lies a grand truth to be revealed. Remove the forces of reterritorialization, Nick Land thought, and let Capital deterritorialize the flows. Then we’ll reach that reality laying it wait: *meltdown*. Hence Land’s lines about authority, which he describes as “instantiating itself as linear instruction pathways,” which, he concludes, are “resonant with the dominator ur-myth that the nature of reality has already been decided.”

What constitutes the binding element in Justin Murphy’s and Nick Land’s output, if not a post-Marxist disbelief in history, and thus, in the eschaton? Everyone laughed at Fukuyama, but the truth is, no one believes in the “angel of history” anymore. History is not meaningful, and we owe nothing to the past, whose failures cannot be redeemed. That the collective emancipation has not happened, and that too much has been expected, and asked, of the collective, might be strictly contingent, but it *is*. All that has not happened, could not have happened.

“It could have been.” Those words are a coping mechanism, for if it *could’ve*, bargains the old Marxist, it means it *could still* — but the truth is, history handed Marxism the mic, and it said what it had to say; it walked its hour upon the stage. Deleuze and Guattari’s calls to follow lines of flight, to pursue local alternatives, to constitute new spaces where sudden machines of struggle could be formed, all pointed to this: there’s nothing more to expect of history. But they didn’t ask either for the struggle to be individual, and Guattari in *New Spaces of Liberty* rightly chastised the anachronism of the individual anarchist, Leninist or traditional Marxist, whose entire stance is ultimately a *personal*, aesthetic affectation, (something all too common on the left and right alike). Accelerationism was the last serious form that the belief in history could take; it was history without dialectic, as if a single force were acting, deterritorialization. It made sense when it appeared.

But believing in dialectical materialism, at this point, is akin to being a pagan; hallucinating old territorialities. What’s the connection between a post-Marxist like Murphy and a neoreactionary like Land if not the apocalyptic? Both begin by positing the falsity of hegemonic discourse — of what most consider “the world” or “reality” — of Calvinist eschatology, and envision an immediate alternative: an exit. Marxism is inherently molar; communism, we read somewhere in *The German Ideology*, “is only possible as the act of the

dominant peoples ‘all at once’ and simultaneously,” while this collective project, Marx continues, is wholly dependent “on the universal development of productive forces and the world intercourse bound up with communism.”

Mark Fisher bewailed somewhere that the future had been taken from us. This could only have come from a Marxist, who saw history as the locus in and through which *it* would happen. His was the oldest story of eschatological movements — the confusion, melancholy and existential dread after the eschaton fails to happen. For Marxists, the realization of the individual is placed at the end of history, in the eschaton. But already, Guattari and Antonio Negri had departed from Marxist orthodoxy by distorting, even perhaps inverting this schema. Rather than the precipitation of an eschatological, collective emancipation which would then produce a realization of individualities, they insisted that molecular aggregates, “machines of revolutionary struggle,” in the first place, had to produce “new social realities and new subjectivities.” Murphy & Land have both abandoned eschatology in favor of the apocalyptic, and their search for a decentralized exit is similar to that described by Guattari and Negri: a willingness to explore all possible ideas, to pursue “molecular actualizations.” Rather than the molar process of eschatological, universal liberation of orthodox Marxism, the thoughts of Land and Murphy organize themselves as apocalyptic, molecular and local exits.

But to fully understand the modern apocalyptic, one must first turn not to its origin, but to the most important prior appearance of the phenomenon. Deleuze and Guattari write somewhere in *A Thousand Plateaus* that ideas “do not die”; that although “they may change their function, their status,” and that “they may even change their form and content,” ... “they keep something essential in their movement, in the repartition of a new domain.” While one should “keep away from resemblances, descent and filiations”, the movement of an idea such as the apocalyptic, from a phenomenon of no slender antiquity, to another, different and modern form, should be the perfect moment for “*remarking the thresholds that an idea crosses,*” as well as “*the travels it achieves.*”

Let’s then travel back to Babylon. Not to its classical age, nowhere near its prime nor its autumn, but rather to a point where it stood the same way Athens stands today. Let’s travel back to 4th century BC Babylon, long after its noontide, and still long after its dusk.

In 323 BC, the East from Egypt to India had been conquered; and as Alexander dies in Babylon, a month short of his thirty-third birthday, a new world is slouching towards Alexandria to be born. The next decades would see Alexander’s generals fight over the control of his empire; and, of all the men who had tried their fate in the Wars of the Successors, only three would emerge supreme, commanding different parts of the dismembered empire. Seleucus and Ptolemy both had left Macedon in 334 BC as young soldiers under Alexander, and, never to see their homeland again, after fifty years of warfare these old, wearied men would find themselves in control of the largest kingdoms of the age, along with Antigonus II,

grandson of another of Alexander’s generals.

The Seleucid Empire extended from Anatolia to the Indus, and ruled over a hundred different cultures, forming a bureaucratic, centrifugal monstrosity highly reliant on the administration of the previous Achaemenid Empire it had taken over. In Egypt, Ptolemy I, ‘The Saviour’, ruled from Alexandria, an administrative and economic center turned towards the Mediterranean, built *ex nihilo* under Alexander. Egypt under the Ptolemies as well as the East under the Seleucids would quickly become beacons of a uniform Greek culture, where a simplified, regularized form of Attic Greek, the *koine* (“common”), served as a universal language for business, diplomacy, and culture. A common, leveled Greece was thus cast over the known world, and local cultural existence, save for the most rural, was thenceforth to take place within a new common language: Hellenism.

The higher classes in Egypt and under the Seleucids alike readily adopted the new culture, which came with newfound prosperity and stability, and required of them little more than the adoption of Greek customs and language. Independent movements and other ‘nationalist’ velleities had already been severely put down by Alexander, and the large-scale Hellenization the Seleucids organized came to mean that opposition would inescapably be absorbed and converted.

For the Jews, Babylonians, Persians, and for dozens other ethnicities, cultures, and religions, the world had suddenly been closed before them — the field of possibility had shrunk to almost nothing. And beyond the native, brute power of Greek monarchs, hellenized, complacent and collaborative elites prevented any kind of political organization against the new order. Millions suddenly experienced an unbearable political problem to which there was no political solution whatsoever: they were trapped.

This historic moment saw the birth of one of antiquity’s most grand creations — the apocalyptic. It is under the overcast sky of middle and late antiquity that the apocalyptic would attain its full bloom, first in the East, under the Seleucids and the Ptolemies, and later, across the Mediterranean basin, under Rome. In Persia against the Seleucids and in Egypt too, against Ptolemaic rule, the apocalyptic was conjured — the *Demotic Chronicle*, the *Potter’s Oracle* and *Nectanebo’s Dream* bear witness to it.

It is against the ubiquitous “this is not an exit” of Bret Easton Ellis, that the apocalyptic first rises. Around 167 BC, Antiochus IV, at the behest of hellenized Jewish elites, begins to turn Jerusalem into a Greek polis renamed as Antioch of Judaea. It is to his reign that we owe the *Book of Daniel*, a Jewish reaction to the ubiquity of Greek culture, which announces not only the fall of that Greek rule, and also through the figure of Daniel, that man who manages through his faith to abstract himself from, and ultimately change, a world he refuses.

Through that figure, the *Book of Daniel* points to a hinterland, a necessary possibility, another time, which is already there. In *Daniel 5* there is Belshazzar's feast, with its purple and golden drapes, the soft skin of dancing, half-nude courtesans, and amidst the floating breath of flutes, the rising, corrupt and triumphant perfumes, the volute plumes of burning benzoin, musk, and incense; amidst the languorous, sensual drunkenness, like women's lips murmuring liquid words in your ear. Amidst and beyond, there is the writing, out there, on the wall; an apocalypse, a sudden revelation, a call that points not only to the possibility of a future change, but to its present actuality. When Daniel is cast to the lions, his faith is met with the impossible: the lions are left unable to attack him. With this motif, a truth is pointed to: that the hegemonic powers only have the power one believes they have.

A century later, the *Book of Mysteries*, a text written by the Essenes, a Jewish sect, describes the Greeks as *not knowing the secret of the way things are*, nor understanding *the things of old*, before announcing an eschatology which is a pure apocalypse. Through a constant increase in light, *true knowledge fills the world*, and the Kingdom of God is revealed. This form that the apocalyptic takes on is the one under which we shall encounter it, in its grandest and final manifestation — in John.

John's Gospel considers man's relationship to Christ as first a calling, a calling that rips through prosaic existence and reveals, behind the veil of a repetitive life and its mundane tasks, reality. Behind the drawing of water, Christ pulls the veil, and shows a superior truth, the *waters of life*, a "well of water, springing up into everlasting life." This miracle, or as John calls it, the σημεῖον, *semeion*, the *sign*, functions as a momentary glimpse into the underlying reality, a field of immanence that only God's transcendence may reveal.

"Light has come into the world," John exclaims, while stressing that the fundamental reality of the world has *always* been that very Light; the reverse of "no one can see the kingdom of God if they are not born again," is that by answering the call of Christ, by accepting a new life, one suddenly sees the world as it really is, as the Kingdom of God. For John, the crucifixion doesn't have the same sense as for Paul and the Pauline gospels; instead of a metaphysical event of cosmic proportions, John finds in the crucifixion the final sign of Christ, the confirmation that the impossible has become possible, a completion that had begun with Lazarus — the call to a new life. The eschaton has always been immanentized, and messianic expectations have suddenly lost meaning; the eschatology of John of Patmos means nothing here, in the face of that sovran Light:

"Say not ye, There are four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."

What does the apocalyptic then do? Like poetry, from the outside, it shows the fundamental alterity of the world. It shows that reality isn't as real as one had thought, that it isn't grounded

on anything, that the idols are hollow; and having done this, it reveals an infinite actuality, the field of the possible, stretching boundless and free, not a call to the end of history, to the accomplishment of the Last Things, but rather, another call, which Pindar described:

μή, φίλα ψυχά, βίον ἀθάνατον

σπεῦδε, τὰν δ' ἔμπρακτον ἄντλει μαχανάν

Do not, O dear soul, to eternal life aspire;

But rather,

exhaust the possibles of your mind.

The Book of Daniel was written around 167 BC. That very year, against hellenized elites and Hellenistic Realism, Judaea erupted in revolt — a long, asymmetric war, fought between the Maccabees and the Seleucid Empire, culminating in the latter's expulsion from Judaea and the establishment of an independent Jewish state. One of the most powerful empires in history had been defeated by highly symbolic *situations* and guerrilla warfare.

Hellenistic Realism was exposed for what it really was — thoroughly unreal. Christianity emerged victorious from the struggle it undertook against the world of late antiquity. Beginning as the only way out the entrapped mind could find, it managed to shape the world according to its own design. Christianity achieved such success precisely because it asserted and confirmed itself, in a closed world, as a grand opening. This was only made possible by its assumption of apocalyptic drives elaborated during the Hellenistic era. By becoming a grand apocalyptic calling, Christianity not only managed to offer an immediate alternative to antiquity; in time, it also replaced the political and cultural decay which had made it necessary.

In antiquity, the apocalyptic took the form of religion only because the religious first discovered it, and accordingly achieved greatness withal. But it doesn't have to be religious, nor eschatological. Through its contention that hegemonic power is not an objective reality, that it is in fact *inconsistent and untenable*; through its demonstration that the realism of the powers in place is in fact not realistic, that it is *nothing of the sort*, the apocalyptic renders hegemonic discourse powerless, and it offers the only viable alternative to the eschatological.

For Marxism and most political thought since the 18th century, the watchword has been “wait; there are four months, and then cometh harvest” — but apocalyptic thought, from Justin Murphy to Bronze Age Pervert, through Land, replies: “lift up your eyes; for the fields are white already to harvest.” There is no nature, whether human or otherwise; that all is impossible in the current state of things means nothing, nothing whatsoever. This state of

things only holds the sway you allow it to hold. Do you want out of this machinery, to spring beyond the neon-lit concrete, the rows of cubicles, the vast expanses of suburban decay? If you desire them, still infinitely actual, the possibility of local alternatives, lines of flight, of a new barbarism, and a return of poetry to life, are here.

*For those who yearn,
A sign has sufficed, and signs
Have always been the language of the gods*

—Hölderlin, *Rousseau*

Ulysses is a writer based in Montreal. Follow him on Twitter.

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